

Glade Cress

(*Leavenworthia exigua* var. *laciniata*)

Glade cress is a tiny plant that is a spring resident of Bullitt and southern Jefferson counties. In fact, this is the only place in the world it grows. Although it is found in numerous sites around these counties it is considered rare because it is so limited in its range.



What does it look like? This plant is about 2-4 inches in height. Small white to lilac colored flowers with four petals appear usually beginning in mid to late March. The fruit are flat and pod-shaped. The leaves are somewhat squarish at the end and appear as disconnected pieces along the main leaf vein. The leaves may be mostly gone when the plant is in fruit.

Where does it grow? Glade cress grows on areas of flat soil, usually the thin soils and gravel around the dolomite rock outcrops that are unique to this area. It is also found in lawns and pastures where moist bare soil is predominant in the spring.

The natural rock outcrops in this area are another important habitat for glade cress but very few remain today. The surface dolomitic limestone has created unusual conditions for plant growth, generally wet in the spring when water is held near the surface and then very dry due to the lack of soil and other vegetation throughout the summer. Glade cress takes advantage of this moist spring by flowering in March and dispersing its seed in May and June, before the other plants can establish. Of course agricultural crops, and even lawns have done poorly where rock is near the soil surface and in many areas, it has been broken up and removed.

Living History Glade cress adapted to the soils, climate and other conditions in the Bullitt and Jefferson counties over many, many years. It is believed that glade cress formerly grew in bison trails and wallows, especially since some of the main bison trails (such as State Road 480) and mineral licks in the region are located here in close association with the range of glade cress. With the bison gone, these tiny plants have become associated with other hoofed animals, primarily cattle.

Why are we interested in glade cress? The plant is becoming less common every year with the change from agricultural farms to residential and other land uses in Bullitt and southern Jefferson counties. If it drops toward extinction, it will be a loss to the natural heritage of this region. We want to provide information to landowners about this species so that, where possible, its habitat can become part of their land management. This plant will persist in fields that are close-cropped, either by mowing or grazing, and as long the site is not heavily disturbed, it should persist. **There are no laws, either state or federal, that will restrict a landowner's use of their property because an endangered plant is found there.** But before this plant gets any closer to extinction, it is our hope that some landowners will become interested in conserving glade cress. We would like to work with them in providing some ideas on how they can manage their property to allow this plant to persist. Also, we are interested in collecting glade cress seed for restoration efforts so it is important to locate many different sites.

What if I see glade cress? We hope you will let us know so we can fill in the range for this species. Either write or call a botanist at the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission or your local extension agent. We will be happy to provide you more information about glade cress.

**Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission
801 Schenkel Lane
Frankfort, KY 40601
(502) 573-2886**

web site address: www.state.ky.us/agencies/nrepc/ksnpc/index.htm

This fact sheet was developed with
funding provided by the
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service